

Mass of Farewell Homily
Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
July 16, 2019

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Bishop of Rapid City

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Wow! Here we are! Thank you for coming to this Mass and gathering here tonight as a faith community. It is important to me and it means a lot to me for you to take the time to be here tonight so that I can say farewell and thank you for all you have given me these past 8 years as I now answer the Lord's call to go to Saginaw. We have come to an end of an era – one of the most fulfilling eras of my priesthood. I am deeply grateful.

But before I speak more on this, I would like to talk about the feast we celebrate today – the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. For me it is only fitting that we have this farewell Mass on a Marian feast day. This feast commemorates the day in the year 1251 when Our Lady gave the brown scapular to St. Simon Stock. The brown scapular (to which many of you are familiar) is an exterior sign of the filial relationship between our Blessed Mother and those who entrust themselves totally to her protection. Hopefully that is all of us! If not, I would encourage it!

How do we entrust ourselves to another person? In friendship, we confide in them. Hopefully that is what happened when you married your spouse, if you are married. Hopefully that is what happened with priests when they approached their ordination. To confide in someone is to reveal and expose one's heart to the other. To confide in someone is to trust them with our cares, especially our deepest, most personal thoughts, feelings and desires. Furthermore, confiding in another person brings honor to them because it expresses our love and devotion.

Who then, is the most perfect and most powerful person to entrust our lives, other than Mary? As a most tender mother, we must learn to always confide in Our Lady. She teaches us how “to do the will of our heavenly Father.” Mary, our Mother, forms us as beloved disciples of her Son Jesus because she was the first disciple. As the one who is “full of grace”, Our Lady of Mount Carmel protects us from the Evil One and is our sure recourse for her maternal intercession.

We not only confide in close friends, but we also abide in the communion of friendship with them. To abide is to dwell with, remain in, or stay in the company of another.

This abiding is both interior –in our hearts– and external in our actions, the way we live. Just as a husband and wife abide with each other even when they are separated from one another, so we too should abide with the one who is “full of grace” Mary our Mother.

Why should we confide and abide in Mary? Why is this important? In the Gospel, Jesus asks, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother. We confide and abide in our Lady because we are always in need of protection from the Evil One. We are weak and vulnerable. We are afraid. We worry about many things.

We confide and abide in Our Lady because she is the most powerful intercessor available to us. She will not fail us!

We confide and abide in Our Lady because she most fully models and teaches us how to do the will of our heavenly Father. Mary’s entire life was devoted to the honor and service of her beloved Son. She is our greatest inspiration. She can teach us.

Confiding in Mary and abiding in the graces she obtains for us is the sure and steady road to our salvation, our happiness, our fulfillment.

She is the one whom I entrust my transition to a new diocese. She is the one who can guide me in this new mission to Saginaw. She is also one who this Diocese can entrust the finding of a new bishop. Ask her to intercede in this cause.

As I said in the beginning, this is an end of an era. Yes, leaving this Diocese is most difficult. These past eight years have been a great blessing for me and my priesthood. These past eight years have been a very important part of these twenty-five years as a priest as well. Though there have been challenges along the way, though things haven’t been perfect – but there is no such thing in ministry – I have felt (feel) deeply blessed for having been able to shepherd you.

I have been inspired by you and your faith; I have felt supported by you in so many ways; and I have felt blessed by you. What a beautiful experience it has been. So thank you.

From my experience, I believe that every assignment forms us for the next one (unless it is retirement!) The many assignments that I have had during my first 17 years of my priesthood, in many ways, prepared me for coming to this diocese to begin my episcopal ministry.

As I wrote in my departing letter in the WRC, “For any priest or bishop, upon their departure from a parish or diocese, we can always look back upon any assignment with some regrets – things we wish we would have done differently, but we can’t turn back the hands of time; things we wish we could have accomplished or completed but were unable to do so because we ran out time, etc. But I will depart this beautiful Diocese of Rapid City with very few regrets – only the deepest gratitude for the many blessings I have received these past eight years.

I have tried to serve with my whole heart, pouring myself into this ministry by living my motto “No Greater Love” in the face of my human flaws and limitations.

I give thanks and praise to almighty God for allowing me to be a part of your lives in this diocese. What a gift I have received from all of you. My love for you and your support for me has been an expression of God’s love. God often times loves us through the people he places in our lives along our pathway of faith. We are molded by the love, care and concern from others. One of my favorite quotes comes from a French novelist, poet, and journalist. Francois Mauriac wrote: *“We are molded and remolded by those who have loved us, and though that love may pass, we remain none the less their work. No love, no friendship can ever cross the path of our destiny without leaving some mark upon it forever.”*

Thank you for leaving your mark upon me. Thank you for sharing your lives with me. I have been forever changed. In many tangible ways, you (and the Lord) have taught me how to be a bishop and shepherd in my first episcopal assignment. Thank you for this. I will take this formation with me as I begin this new assignment shepherding the people of the Diocese of Saginaw. But know that you will not be forgotten. You and the many facets of the Diocese of Rapid City will always have a place in my heart.

I also hope that I have left my own mark upon you and the Diocese of Rapid City – the love and care of Jesus Christ. I believe that together we have accomplished much these past eight years. We must give praise and glory to Christ for all we have been able to do. I leave knowing that the faith of the people of the Diocese of Rapid City is alive and bearing fruit. I leave with much for you to build upon in living the mission of Jesus Christ. Stay close to Jesus, continuing to seek his will, and he will continue to lead you to heights beyond your imagination.

The challenges of being a bishop are many and I have tried my best. But I also take leave knowing of my own deficiencies and sinfulness. Love is reflected in seeking and offering forgiveness.

If I have offended or hurt any of you in any way, whether knowingly or unknowingly, I am deeply sorry. I apologize and humbly ask your forgiveness.

In conclusion, I thank all of you – the wonderful people of the Diocese of Rapid City – for your prayers and support over these past eight years. This departure brings about a big hole in my heart that will remain for a long time. What will also remain though is the great generosity of God experienced in being your bishop. As I take leave, allow me to ask one more thing. Please continue to pray for me as I will for you. May the Lord send you a new bishop worthy of your love!

So let us now entrust ourselves and what we carry in our hearts – my transition, your desire and prayer for a holy bishop – to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in this beautiful prayer that I ask you to pray with me.

O most beautiful flower of Mt. Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist us in our necessity. O Star of the Sea, help us and show us you are our Mother.

O Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and earth, we humbly beseech you from the bottom of our hearts to assist us in this necessity – our prayer request. There are none that can withstand your power. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Sweet Mother we place these desires, these requests in your hands.... [and bring them about through your love for us.] Amen.